

Presentation on Interoperability
To
12 April 2006

Everyone is fond of quoting Edmund Burke who said that all that it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.

I would submit that good people are less likely to do something if they do not have interoperable communications.

We do not have interoperable communications in Pierce County but we intend to get there.

Getting there is a goal which is consistent with the approach which we have taken to disaster preparedness and terrorism preparedness county-wide.

And I speak from the standpoint of a County-wide perspective. I am one of the only officials here who ultimately has responsibility for public safety for people in every corner of this 1800 square mile 750,000 person county.

Our approach, our doctrine for preparedness is “all hazards / all partners.” As you are well aware, over 75% of the preparation for natural disaster is applicable in the area of responding to a terrorist incident.

In collaboration with our municipal partners and in even closer collaboration with our colleagues in the Pierce County Department of Emergency Management, we have placed the people in this county in a good position with regard to readiness. From computer mapping schools and critical infrastructure to establishing temporary radio frequency patching to regularly running disaster and attack drills to forming a national model Terrorism Early Warning Group including law enforcement, fire service, hospitals, transportation, utilities, business and the military - - - literally all partners - - - we have done a great deal.

But we still have a lot to do to extend and improve our position.

And one of the primary things that we need to do is to establish a stronger, more permanent interoperable communications.

I know that America values local control. We have 19 law enforcement agencies and 23 fire districts and 8 PSAP's (Public Safety Answering Points) in Pierce County - - - and God Bless us for our dedication to local control.

But some challenges - - - terrorism (whether international or home grown) and large scale disasters and mass civil disturbance events are three examples of such challenges - - - some challenges do not lend themselves to purely local response.

It is for this reason that Washington State - - - through our Washington State Sheriffs and Chiefs Association - - - has just completed a statewide Law Enforcement Emergency Mobilization plan in which jurisdictions within Counties and in multiple county regions have plans to support and assist one another.

And it is also for this reason that Pierce County has just issued an RFP for a comprehensive County-wide multidisciplinary study of communications interoperability.

The study will cost almost \$60,000 dollars. The Sheriff's Department and DEM are financing this study which will be completed by early fall. This study is based on the premise that communications interoperability - - - specifically the technology and equipment and organization which will enable voice communication and data to flow between agencies and across disciplines - - - is absolutely necessary for proper response to disasters and terrorist attack.

The study is intended to provide direction as to the best and most cost-effective approach to achieving interoperability. It is recognized that the cost of achieving interoperability will run to the tens of millions of dollars for Pierce County.

We want to be sure that we get the best possible performance and durability for an investment of that magnitude.

I have described our doctrine our needs and our decision to take responsibility and move forward on this issue.

The question is what is the proper role of the Federal Government ? Remember that I said that we seem to value - - - if not sometimes to overvalue - - - local control.

But the fact is that the magnitude of the challenge and level of the impact far exceeds local jurisdictions when it comes to terrorism and large scale disasters.

In light of this, we do not intend to passively hold out our hands and ask the Federal Government to solve all of our problems. We do, however, ask that the Federal Government sign on as an active partner in this essential work.

I would ask that our Federal Partners consider a number of options.

First of all, I would ask that the administration consider very carefully whether this is really a good time to cut back on law enforcement technology funding. Planning, procuring and deploying interoperable communications is totally inconsistent with Federal funding cutbacks in this area.

I would ask that we also have the ability to hire personnel to deal with Federal encouragement to step up to issues of disaster preparedness and terrorism. Our business cannot be automated. People are necessary to plan to carry out plans and to act when

disaster strikes. And in the area of terrorism, only properly trained and supervised people can prevent terrorism. As we face Federal cutbacks on COPS grants we face a reduced ability to respond to prevent rather than to mitigate.

With the recent large scale disasters in the Southeastern United States, I need not describe the importance of local and regional preparedness. And of course, Federal leadership, guidance and resource access is essential in this area as well.

We on the local level believe that we have a responsibility to step forward. We believe it when the President and the Congress tell us that we are on the frontline in terrorism and disasters.

But as we are ramping up our efforts we also believe that our Federal brothers and sisters need to keep pace. Please take the message back to the Capitol that we are willing to do our part. But when challenges are of a national and regional scale, we need partners who will step up to support local efforts. We believe in preparation. We are willing to invest and to sacrifice. We ask that the Federal Government support us in this by increasing - - - or at least not decreasing - - - the resources needed for locals to address problems of regional and national and international scale.

In short, we believe that public safety is not a spectator sport. And we ask that our Federal partners stay with us on the field.